

# LISTEN

A Poetry Quarterly  
edited by  
GEORGE HARTLEY

2/4

Kingsley Amis  
D J Enright  
John Holloway  
Elizabeth Jennings  
Philip Larkin  
Charles Madge  
C A Trypanis

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# LISTEN

EDITED BY GEORGE HARTLEY

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*Cover design discovered by Quatrezoneilles*



Her dwindling future clenched within her fists,  
 An ancient woman stands and rocks between two sticks.  
 Some missionary sits nearby, foreign and well-fed,  
 And marks his students' homework: Chinese characters  
 Are rendered into 'Incarnation', 'Cross', 'Redemption',  
                   which he ticks.

We have laid our treasures up in books. Can riches crawl  
 In gutters unregarded, be battered in these buses?  
 Pain, dirt and simple waste — the crucial ideograms  
 We do not mark, the untranslated writing on the city wall.

The other had his ample donkey, and a decent road;  
 He bore one cross, some hoist two crutches.  
 Redeem us from our homework, Lord, this load  
 Of paper characters. Oh Christ remit these preachers  
                   who practise a fair hand.

How many seats are there in your father's house?  
 Is the grotto hung with crutches and discarded teachers?

## MISSION HOME FOR AGED WOMEN

D. J. Enright

(Yokohama, February 17th, 1955)

They cried to God as their years grew dearer:  
     Our Father, which art not here.  
 They mumbled sutras as the flames ran nearer:  
     Amida-Butsu, who does not appear.

Only a telephone obtained an answer. Men came  
     Alone to snatch those shrivelled brands.  
 Contemptible man, still struggling to reclaim  
     The gifts let fall from the gods' horny hands.

Tenshu was abroad, a mission board consultant;  
     The view from the Western Heaven was dim.  
 Bare forked fireman, balked by an empty hydrant,  
     Heard their last prayers, addressed to him.



## SONNET

John Holloway

How lucky you are. First, your 'good lady'; who  
 Makes such a fine hostess. Oh, and mother. She  
 Comes (as you say) of an old family,  
 Teachers, solicitors, colonials. No wonder you

Have handsome children. Important work, too :  
 Real public service. But leaves you much time free.  
 And then there's your convenient house. For me,  
 As you point out, things are — different. True.

But how lucky you are. I should want to sing  
 For joy, in your place, all day long. Yes, and shout  
 (Like you) in a loud confident voice. The man  
 We all admire. There's just one little thing

I'd like to know. *When did they do you out*  
*Of your white stick, your Alsatian dog, tin can?*

## NO MAIL FROM A FRIEND

John Holloway

All through from summer to the equinox,  
 And on, into the winter calm, he stayed  
 Mum as a lid snapped down upon a box;  
 And I believed it strange, for he was made  
 A quick gregarious man, amiable,  
 Adept with tales to please the girls and boys,  
 Affable to women, forthcoming to one and all,  
 Knowing the speaking for the singing voice.  
 The postman passes now in slush each day,  
 But I sit snug and read beside the fire,  
 Having seen it's not through work, or poverty,  
 Or shame of his black town, that still I hear  
 No word. It's that magnanimous ease which I  
 Never can catch : though all the time I try.

## ORGANIC CHEMISTRY

John Holloway

Sharply, the simmering liquid crystallised.  
 The suave experimenter looked surprised  
 And, frankly, something of a fool.  
 What had thrown him out?  
 No fault within a faultless method, but  
 A brutal symptom of a radical misrule.

Daylight cannot be caged. Hybrids revert.  
 The experimenter went out in the street  
 Where misrule makes a strong technique.  
 Stood all day long where four roads meet,  
 Boarded buses, dropped into crowded bars,  
 Gossiped about horses, dogs, girls, film stars,  
 With tradesmen, workmen, commercial travellers.  
 Mated the ordinary, too, with the outrageous :  
 Litter, dust, warm street sand  
 Blown in the sudden circles of the wind,  
 Sweet sawmill smell, painters in overalls,  
 Talkative driver of delivery van,  
 Shabby cats on steps in sun,  
 Dogs bred to monsters, monsters shrunk to men,  
 Grown women's clothes on girls,  
 Painted crone in summer frock : —  
 And all this time he vowed  
 To cut everyone in a white coat, or a black,  
 And stick to the rule-of-thumb methods of the crowd.

What good is there in what makes what is live, turn salt?  
 Brought by its very quintessentiality to a halt?  
 What good, he wanted to know, in thought  
 Map-logical, wholly self-assured?  
 Now he hunted qualities of a coarser sort :  
 Pitcher-plant-patient to become  
 (Like the fertile population of a slum)  
 Ugly, rich, succulent as a gourd.

What people work in mines  
 That yield the richest ore?  
 Rough luck, rough usage, rough designs  
 Had become his daily fare.  
 Back at the bench at last he took his stance :  
 They flung the doors back wide,  
 All and sundry flocked inside

(Falstaff boozing with the Danish Prince):  
 Was this the upshot of all his toil?  
 His substance did not boil,  
 It turned a harsh, hard, bursting gem,  
 A supernova, on its dusty, leafy stem.

## THE BROTHERS

John Holloway

South, in the town, the sun had spread  
 All day flame-warm. Their lives had been  
 Colourful and noisy as a fair  
 For a long time. Northward, instead,  
 A wind-cleared sky ranged iron-green.  
 Frost gripped the hill. The copse lay bare.

Yet, slowly, slowly, they all  
 (By the sharp east or gentle west)  
 Bowed to the image, and returned.  
 That distant place was radical.  
 Going there was the acid test.  
 But they forgot how acid burned.

The light grew cold. The journey spread  
 Itself out strangely. Space became  
 A conjurer's trick, and multiplied:  
 Because the living and the dead  
 Possess (though they may share one name)  
 No common ground, however wide.

And spread too, since the will that drove  
 Them jarred against their course: like brakes,  
 Harsher and harsher as they neared,  
 For now they saw this one could prove  
 Unmendable among mistakes.  
 Then small as life the croft appeared.

There on the brown dew-budded turf  
 Greedy as crows all three they stood.  
 They saw the copse, the five hay-stacks,  
 The hill; heard the ice wind, the surf.  
 But found no sweet impossible food.  
 Gazed at each other. Turned their backs.



## RECAPITULATION

Elizabeth Jennings

Being a child it was enough to stand  
 The centre of a world and let success  
 Come crowding in, be taken by the hand.  
 This was one way to lose a loneliness.

Until success itself became a part  
 I played. It was the shell and centre too.  
 My mind was somewhere else, also my heart.  
 I could not tell the false self from the true.

Now I abandon all my attributes —  
 Failure, success, despair — until I have  
 Nothing at all but hard, invincible doubts  
 Shaping the one self that I can believe.

## HOUSES

Elizabeth Jennings

Most of them we have not built  
 Or even chosen. Rather it is as if  
 We came there half by chance and half in hope  
 And found within them some shape to our life,  
 Like feelings that we do not know we felt  
 Until some memory shows they have gone deep.

And in the rooms inside them we  
 (Not in our own but in a stranger's home)  
 Look at the way he hangs a picture, puts  
 Books on the shelves, hoping we may assume  
 By outward signs his true identity  
 And come upon his heart by devious routes.

Yet which of us would not prefer  
 To have his house entirely of his making  
 Right from the first foundations deeply laid?  
 Instead we alter what we find and lacking  
 A style that shows our presence everywhere,  
 Hide with possessions what we have not made.

## REFERRED BACK

Philip Larkin

*That was a pretty one*, I heard you call  
 From the unsatisfactory hall  
 To the unsatisfactory room where I  
 Played record after record, idly,  
 Wasting my time at home, that you  
 Looked so much forward to.

Oliver's *Riverside Blues*, it was. And now  
 I shall, I suppose, always remember how  
 The flock of notes those antique negroes blew  
 Out of Chicago air into  
 A huge remembering pre-electric horn  
 The year after I was born  
 Three decades later made this sudden bridge  
 From your unsatisfactory age  
 To my unsatisfactory prime.

Truly, though our element is time,  
 We are not suited to the long perspectives  
 Open at each instant of our lives.  
 They link us to our losses: worse,  
 They show us what we have as it once was,  
 Blindingly undiminished; just as though  
 By acting differently we could have kept it so.

## THE SOURCES OF THE PAST

Kingsley Amis

A broken flower-stem, a broken vase,  
 A matchbox torn in two and thrown  
 Among the scraps of glass:  
 At a last meeting, these alone  
 Record its ruptures, bound its violence,  
 And, so it seems, are certain to retain  
 This charted look of permanence  
 In the first moment's pain.

But now the door slams, the steps retreat,  
 Into one softness night will blend  
 The shared, the hard street;  
 The fragments and the flower, darkened

Just because time must pass, alter the room  
 And build there only a slurred memory,  
 Surcharge the kindness of the gloom  
 With kind falsity.

All fragments of the past, near or far,  
 Come down to us framed in a calm  
 No contemplations jar,  
 But they grub it up from idle time,  
 And, could that bland order be torn away,  
 What vulgar agitation would be shown :  
 What silly hauntings behind clay,  
 What fussing behind stone?

## THE WIND AT PENISTONE

Donald Davie

The wind meets me at Penistone.

A hill

Curves empty through the township, on a slope  
 Not cruel, and yet steep enough to be,  
 Were it protracted, cruel.

In the street,

A plainness rather meagre than severe  
 Affords, though quite unclassical, a vista  
 So bald as to be monumental.

Here

A lean young housewife meets me with the glance  
 I like to think that I can recognise  
 As dour, not cross.

And all the while the wind,

A royal catspaw, toying easily,  
 Flicks out of shadows from a tufted wrist,  
 Its mane perhaps this lemon-coloured sun.

The wind reserves, the hill reserves, the style  
 Of building houses on the hill reserves  
 A latent edge;

which we can do without

In Pennine gradients and the Pennine wind  
 And never miss, or, missing it, applaud  
 The absence of the aquiline;

which in her

Whose style of living in the wind reserves



An edge to meet the wind's edge, we may miss  
But without prejudice.

And yet in Art,  
Where all is patent, and a latency  
Is manifest or nothing, even I,  
Liking to think I feel these sympathies,  
Can hardly praise this clenched and muffled style.

For architecture asks a cleaner edge,  
Is open-handed.

And close-fisted people  
Are mostly vulgar; only in the best  
Who draw, inflexible, upon reserves,  
Is there a stern game that they play with life,  
In which the rule is not to show one's hand  
Until compelled.

And then the lion's paw!  
Art that is dour and leonine in the Alps  
Grows kittenish, makes curios and clocks,  
A prince at play.

Here, nothing. So the wind  
Meets me at Penistone and, coming home,  
The poet falls to special pleading, chilled  
To find in Art no fellow but the wind.

## HUMANIST

Donald Davie

Not spruce, not conifer  
In saddened ranks,  
Thickening declivities,  
Blurring the reservoir,  
Enclose my house on the shaws.

Not the crab-apple orchard  
Nor lean and ghostly elms  
Nor the writhing thorn,  
Nothing indigenous  
To this hard country, clothe her.

But, as always, as straight,  
Luxuriant and natural  
As may be, the tall timber

Deciduous on the altar,  
Ribbing the dancing floor.

For in a region of storm  
Who takes it upon himself  
To call up the spirits of air?  
Or who, in marginal land,  
Invokes the earth spirits?

Let awe be of the nature  
Of a sedate elation;  
And let the woman who dances  
Be the woman of the house.  
Let hers be the presence also.

## HUNT ON EVEREST

Charles Tomlinson

The mind suspends them, edging up the face,  
But they were firm as cats that cross a wall,  
And toothcomb calculations had not missed  
The fleas of chance that make us itch and fall.

Turn from that picture now and start at this  
Where mass is shamed by meteorology  
And fastnesses, laid flat upon their backs,  
A roll of blueprints are the views you see.

The plan prevailed. Its very flawlessness,  
Perfected by a flaw, could not admit  
The mountain was a mountain standing there —  
The reason (you recall) for climbing it.

Poets, keep rough your slopes and jut your peaks,  
Abundance where barbarities persist,  
For when we taste the air your heroes breathe  
You rescue mountains from the strategist.

## A BESTIARY FOR SCHOLASTICS

Charles Tomlinson

These beasts are fabulous, yet were believed  
 When minds were fabulous. Impossibilities  
 Guarding their feline bulk with reptile stings,  
 (The woodcut cannot lie) cross-bred with fish,  
 While pure strains, tugged by etymologies,  
 Littered their dracos, sirens, bulls with wings.  
 Unquestioned as the ghost got Him who rose,  
 Firm as the Virgin's bodily ascent,  
 A faith in unicorns would not suppose  
 The fact betrayed by what the symbol meant.  
 Such sureness and such beauty, you may say,  
 To lock a universe within a fable;  
 But, crucified, your mind's integrity  
 May never rise to prove that world is stable,  
 Though, sanctioned by a church, you will be free  
 To bind your god inside a bestiary.

## THE VIGIL

A. Alvarez

*'The spider love, which transubstantiates all.'— Donne*

You stand in the first dumbness of the snow  
 As finely, the gauze drop in pantomime,  
 All detail fades upon your startled face  
 And back to darkness line and colour flow.

The paralytic rapture of the bone  
 Has come; what rain on stone and age in us  
 Rattle the snow dispenses equally —  
 Years towards death in one short afternoon.

The mouth lifts at one corner, on the crown  
 Regally twists the hair against the white  
 Stark imposition of a nervous fit,  
 Aging in frozen tumult like a clown.



You mime stock-still your final comic pose :  
 Seduced by the earthy Widower of Spades  
 Slowly to dissolution and the blank  
 Tumbler's lust for stature and repose.

## THE CATHARSIS

A. Alvarez

It is the tenderness you feel you know  
 You may have had the tenderness you miss.

Still in the mask you wear your tongue can go  
 Raptly to themes the audience won't guess

Creating from those fragments of thin air  
 Within the head's O what you might have been.

You are not less because they cannot share  
 All that you are and tell what they have seen.

Still they're agog. Your eloquence will flow  
 Beyond the measure pacing your distress

Till it breaks down the limits of your care  
 And finally you relish what you seem

And are to your last sense all you forgo.  
 Love. The particular. No more no less.

## THE BLOOD

C. A. Trypanis

*And all along the towers and the battlements  
 were drenched with mingled Trojan and Achaean  
 blood.*  
*Iliad XII. 430 f.*

Who can distinguish now the mingling blood?  
 Achaean and Trojan bloodstains clot the same,  
 And when the wall has dwindled into mud

No ghost will talk, no monument will blame  
 Paris and Helen for that epic waste,  
 And dog-eyed love will laugh, not touched by shame.

They say in Hell that soldiers' souls are faced  
By dark files of remorse, the tooth of guilt,  
Because they wantoned in the violent taste

Of brother's blood, blood in self-glory spilt.  
Who knows? But the tall citadel of Troy  
Is always falling; soldiers clutch the hilt

Of daggers, tilt the long spears to destroy,  
Sink deeper still in that corrupting flood.  
It seems that in steep folly men enjoy

A curse the Gods once loosened in their blood,  
Man's life, a blood-smeared wall, rooted in silt,  
That topples in the water's wrench and thud :

Blood will cry out for more blood to be spilt.

## BODY AND SOUL

George Hartley

For Jean

The mystics make their flesh a home for God  
And this is love beyond our wildest dreams,  
But patient scholars have the right to plod  
To prove the candle burnt at both extremes.

Yet obvious errors win the needed charm  
For sage observers make the same mistake;  
No gaseous vertebrate gets near to warm,  
So he loves best who gives what he can take.

This mirage which they beg the soul to crave  
Was subject to the object of their love,  
And, when the will refused, they could not brave  
The absence that they never hoped to prove :

' My soul doth magnify ' and, like a glass  
That's curved to hold the dissipated sun,  
Refracts a heat which consecrates a mass —  
Not sure of how to melt they could not run.

They saw the light but felt the point of heat  
 (The bag of filth they could not hope to burst)  
 Refractory to the flesh they hoped to cheat;  
 A woman was salvation for the cursed,

And so, it seems, the language to describe  
 Erotic facts must clothe the naked soul.  
 'The poetry's in the paradox', we cried;  
 Yet smoke without a fire begins to pall.

Now their glass love reflects our new desires,  
 For supple love would make us bend proud necks  
 And, as we sink, rekindles all her fires  
 Where twofold love unites the double sex.

## A NEW EARTH

Charles Madge

We thumbed a lift out of the town  
 But when the driver stopped, I said  
 We'd walk. Hot sunshine after rain  
 Made the earth smell.

The bright and cheery sound of larks  
 Was rising high as were our hopes  
 And very soon the engine's noise  
 Faded away.

Behind us was the chimneyed town  
 That nestled in its vale of smoke  
 Industrious; before us lay  
 A patterned wold.

We had left our town and home to turn  
 Upon the mercy of the world,  
 To seek new works, new loves, new lands  
 At that world's end

And in our inexperienced youth  
 We took the earnest of the sun  
 As ours, we took the song of birds  
 To be our song.



How right we were, as well how wrong  
 Would gradually test itself  
 Against the hard demands of time,  
 The wheel of days.

And yet not only did the birds  
 Embroider silence, but the hum  
 Of other traffic came and roared  
 And went again.

A motor cycle, an old car,  
 A builder's lorry went and came,  
 Across the valley a slow train  
 Clattered along.

A tractor pounded in the field  
 And, miles above in the faint sky  
 Hurtled, alone, an unknown shape  
 Faster than sound.

How old beneath it seemed the hill!  
 Raising its brow among the trees  
 The tomb of an uncounted age,  
 Silent and sad.

Such was the order of the years  
 And such perhaps the precedence —  
 First hill, then bird, then farmer, we  
 At the tail end

Mere tramps, fleeing the grinding sound  
 Of motors, of the engineers'  
 Chimaeras, and the factories  
 That turn them out —

Numerous shells, deserted soon,  
 Dated, left rusting in no time  
 Even before our language gave  
 'The things a name.

## THE BARE HILL

Michael Goymour

Sorrow in the tree's heart, beloved,  
 A haunting smile under the pool,  
 And, wherever I turned, discovery of a world  
 Whose truth is the keen memory of sense;  
 An occupation for a whole summer.  
 And the wind still blowing across autumn gardens,  
 That stirred your hair when you gave gifts,  
 New eyes, bright pain, solitude,  
 Grown from the decay of that sweet season  
 Whose nature is to be irrecoverable,  
 The paradisaal archetype argued in first convalescence  
 As the wound is closed, as the gate shuts.  
 Still blowing at hollow Easter,  
 And heard on the bare hillside,  
 As though there had been an enormous lie told,  
 And I left there, too numb and too amazed  
 To waken amid clamour of April.  
 I stood among the risen crocus spears, considering  
 How love renews the vision, and guides with pain  
 Towards vision's end, beyond scope of comfort,  
 Until poor soul and body move in solitude,  
 A sermon, but — Here am I!  
 Excuse my cry. Oh, it is a crying shame.  
 No sermon, please, no answer.

Today the trees have stood perfected many weeks.  
 Well, if the sensual summer is over,  
 The birds will not all die in winter,  
 The earth stays warm under the cold.  
 This year summer is long, I drive off chimaeras,  
 I mouth by dawnlight aves and paternosters.  
 And I turn upon the bare hill again,  
 Unexpectant in the darkening of the day.  
 Here am I. When in fact no voice called me,  
 Seeking caritas among the dandelions,  
 Here am I, as the light fails,  
 And break, break, for my theme.  
 Leaf, wind and water, a blown garment changing,  
 There is no language or sign at all,  
 No disturbance at any life or death of mine,  
 Then take from the bare earth that same bright pain.  
 A voice, my voice, falling into the sky,

Calling under the perfected trees,  
 Here am I. Here am I.  
 And the trees still nodding gravely  
 In a rising wind,  
 And the disturbance of my prayer between the dandelions  
 Seeming quite unheard of.

There was a time to marry, you have your own children,  
 So that I, midway in *vita nuova*,  
 Turn back in memory, beloved,  
 And pace, head in the wind, through the late afternoon,  
 Among thoughts that stand here, like statues in a garden.

## NUMEN

Iain Fletcher

You have wounded us  
 With our own healing;  
 Looking for us as a bride,  
 Face half turned aside;  
 Folding the one sparrow  
 In the bent arm of the bough;  
 You will heal us then  
 Who wounded us now.  
 Children with dark eyes  
 And those who had no claim,  
 Were lost before beginning;  
 And lonely fishermen  
 Upon the long sea ways  
 Under the striding sail  
 When the day's danger numbs  
 The danger beyond time;  
 And those in white surprise  
 Because the world leaps up  
 In dazzle, tumult and pain,  
 You touch by stealth,  
 Veiled, without number, lure  
 Their hands towards yourself  
 To bear the sharp small weight  
 Of what unburdens them:  
 Let me remember this  
 By your common grace,  
 Life that is dying here  
 In a wild near place.



*The Nightfishing*, W. S. Graham. (Faber, 10/6.)  
*Pedasmus*, C. A. Trypanis. (University of Reading, 5/-.)

I SHOULD start, I suppose, by admitting that until now I have had one or two niggling doubts about Mr Graham's poems ; in particular their poker-faced look and their complete insularity rather unnerved me. The title-poem of this volume has, however, reassured me for the very good reason that Mr Graham has turned these faults into virtues ; *The Nightfishing* could hardly have been as good as it is without them. It is really a poem about the process of writing a poem, this particular poem, and one finds it shares some of the preoccupations of Mr Eliot's *Four Quartets*. In *Burnt Norton* we find :

Only by the form, the pattern  
 Can words or music reach  
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.

And in *The Nightfishing* :

So this is the place. This  
 Is the place fastened still with movement,  
 Movement as calligraphic and formal as  
 A music burned on copper.

Mr Graham's sometimes very odd syntax might be the pattern referred to ; his words are carefully placed and their function is the dual one of keeping the experience (of a voyage to a herring fishing-ground) 'still' on the page, and, by the placing of certain key-words, of preserving the 'movement'. The recurring, weighted references to the dead, the living, and, of course, the sea, serve precisely this dual purpose. The 'ineluctable modality' of observation is always allowed for ; a shift of emphasis changes the pattern of the experience and, it follows, the pattern of the verse.

. . . set dead at  
 The mingling flood, I am put forward on to  
 Live water, clad in oil, burnt by salt  
 To life.

The question in those lines is who is burnt to life? The poet, certainly, is 'dead' when he is 'set' at the 'mingling flood', and although he is 'clad in oil', like a channel swimmer, insulated from the 'live water', it is no use, he is 'burnt' to life, like a phoenix. Equally it yields the sense that he is making a *dead set* at the sea as one might at an attractive woman ; in this case it is the water that is made live by the salt and is threshing about under a garment of oil. Certainly the river flowing into the sea used as a symbol for death is familiar enough and roomy enough to accommodate both meanings. In addition, the notion of the poem as a kind of death for the poet, coupled with the idea of it being written in a 'trance', encourages one to a Gravesian interpretation of *The Night-*

*fish*ing, with the sea as the counterpart of the White Goddess.

I have obviously strayed too far already into the metaphysical implications of the thing ; Mr Graham continually insists on giving full weight to the physical nature of the experience and the poem :

I'm come to this place  
(Come to this place)

It is rubbed in later on in *Letter II* :

Myself now at this last  
Word I die in. This last.

We have to recognise

The sea as metaphor of the sea. The boat  
Rides in its fires.

If the poem was the purpose of the voyage, then equally the voyage was the reason for the poem, and it has to get its due emphasis. 'The boat', whichever way one looks at it, is the poet's craft.

If I seem to have spent an undue amount of space on one poem, and only on a few lines of it at that, then my excuse is that 'The Night-fishing' is the richest and most important poem in the book and, in its own right, one of the best I have read for a long time. It ought to establish Mr Graham as the best poet of his generation.

I feel very apologetic towards Professor Trypanis for having left so little space in which to discuss his collection. If *Pedasus* has a fault, it is that the poems it contains do not seem to dig very deep ; the language, although it is fresh and achieves a nice balance between a high style and an idiomatic manner, does not put down roots. These poems bear a striking resemblance to those of Cavafy which appeared in translation some years ago ; and it does seem that Professor Trypanis's poems might very well be translations of things he would have written in his native tongue (he is Greek) in other circumstances. So, really, I suppose my grumble doesn't have much substance because, as Mr G. S. Fraser pointed out to me, if one looks through the Greek Anthology one sees that most of the poets aim at putting what they have to say as lucidly and precisely as possible without bothering too much about its connotations. There certainly are lines in *Pedasus* which might have come from the Anthology :

— Silently, unawares and unbelievably come all  
Great things : the inroad of great love, the mist  
of death.

Professor Trypanis's epigrammatic gift is particular telling in *The Purple Cloak*, one of the best poems in the book :

It is not in good taste to be the Emperor's  
Guest, and to attract greater attention  
Than his sacred person does. And no one is more  
Sensitive to things in bad taste than Caligula.

These poems are mature and cultivated ; their occasional naiveties add to, rather than detract from, their value, simply because they are the naiveties of a highly civilised man.

*Gordon Wharton*

## DEAD LION AND LIVE DOG

*The Poems of David Raikes.* (Fantasy Press, 8/6.)

*Descartes and the Animals*, Bernard Bergonzi. (Platform, 5/-.)

DAVID RAIKES was still no more than twenty when he was killed in action in Italy in April, 1945. The photo that forms the frontispiece, and the liberal introduction by (I imagine) his old housemaster — in which it is detailed lovingly how the poet 'discovered' Dickens at Oxford though later tending to prefer Howard Spring, or how he 'treasured the outlook on life that Radley had inspired rather than created in' him — make it quite clear that he was one of the 'salt of the earth', simple, loving, bursting with noble qualities and emotions and almost disastrously unafraid of expressing them. Whether he was also a poet is another question. It is an art that demands less nobility than low cunning. Rupert Brooke, for instance (if one must compare war-poets with war-poets) remains at his most readable precisely at those moments when, in a Radleian sense, he is really being a bit of a cad.

Certainly Raikes shows no precocious subtlety or control of his medium. He was of course terribly young when he died, so much so that it is as impossible as it would be futile to assess what he might have done had he survived. Perhaps much, perhaps nothing. But poems must present themselves to posterity naked of reservations and excuses — what is it to the reader that this author suffered from improper education, that this one died young of the staggers, that that one was emotionally smothered by Mum? We are callous of necessity, and the true poets would not have it otherwise. Posterity will not (I think) read David Raikes' poems: nevertheless it is good that this tribute to an endearing temperament should have been made, and the poems, even though they may not be viable alone, afford the best possible illustrations of it.

Mr Bernard Bergonzi is not without his share of low cunning, but I doubt if he is possessed by the necessary relentless daemon. This does not invalidate his poems; cultured, pleasant, accomplished, often deliberately flat, sometimes perhaps unintentionally so, this book reads like a 'Critic's Credential' — I mean that Mr Bergonzi, having now shown that 'he can do it', is in a sounder position for devoting the rest of his life to discussion of how others do it. I do not know whether this is his intention. But, if it is, I hope that he will not abandon the craft entirely; he can write clear and interesting verse, and one or two of these poems (the title-piece especially) show real achievement. If he could walk out of the Empsonian shadow into a more intuitive sunlight, his future work might show even more.

*Hilary Corke*



*Oxford Poetry 1954*, Edited by Jonathan Price and Anthony Thwaite. (Fantasy Press, 5/-.)

*The Necklace*, Poems by Charles Tomlinson. Introduction by Donald Davie. (Fantasy Press, 4/6.)

So many reviewers have praised or denounced the poets of the Fantasy Press as if they were all one movement—or even one poet—that I opened *Oxford Poetry 1954* consumed with curiosity to see whether the poems would be like what I had been told to expect. On the whole they are: they are Empsonian, colloquial, polished, and every one of them rhymes; and they have a lot in common. They like using mythology—Greek and biblical—but because they do not really take it seriously they have a special use for it—they use it to disprove itself. John Mallet makes Daedalus say, of goddesses and all that,

Do not tell this to me,  
Who set no store by quaint mythology.

Anthony Thwaite does much the same in *Contra Artem Amoris*: 'legends attempt to trick the scene' he begins by admitting, and then plunges, with enjoyment, into them. This is effective (I like both these poems) but very limited. It is as if the Oxford poets have only one poem to write about legends; though they are so well-read, and so competent, that they can go on writing it in different shapes, and with different illustrations, and get away with it.

One thing the reviewers had not prepared me for, however, was the preoccupation with sex. Quite right and natural for young men, you may say; but that is the trouble. It is only too natural. Jonathan Price and George MacBeth seem to have been playing a kind of peeping-and-versifying game:

When Madame Janus ran the virgin trade

She looked both ways: her clients toed the line,

writes Mr Price; Mr MacBeth responds by dedicating to him a poem called *Advice to a Peeping Tom*. A snigger is a snigger, however elegant and self-conscious, and I don't like these poems. I do not care for any of Mr Macbeth's poems: in fact they are very Empsonian, and it is difficult to perceive a poetic personality beneath the influence; perhaps this is not an unredeemed fault: some would argue that competent pastiche, in a young poet, is more promising than too much personality, and there are certainly many distinguished poets who fit this view. But even then I would rather put my money on Mr Price who, with Geoffrey Hill, is perhaps the best in the book. Mr Hill's *In Memory of Jane Fraser* is lovely, but I must end by quoting a verse of Mr Price that seems to me a good touchstone for the whole volume. If you don't like it you won't like much else:

The patient seldom sees his fever chart

(A thoughtful doctor hides the thing away)

But guesses much from what he knows in part.

. . .

Charles Tomlinson is a disciple of Wallace Stevens. He likes the facts of experience, not the gloss of mythology :

A dryad is a sort of chintz curtain  
Between myself and a tree.

His people rest a moment on the landscape, barely perceived, yet strangely real :

From the palace flanking the waterfront  
She is about to embark, but pauses.  
Her dress is a veil of sound  
Extended upon silence.

I wonder how many people really know that Wallace Stevens is a good poet — as opposed, that is, to having been told so. Mr Stevens is out of the main line of English poetry. Like Keats and Tennyson, he strives to be faithful to physical experience ; but not, like them, through word-painting — rather through a sort of slanted language, a symbolism that defies comment. It is a mark of this special sort of poetry that more people can react to it than can judge it — a separation of function I would normally regard as dangerous.

Now I do not know how good Mr Tomlinson's poems are. In most cases I should take that as a strong presumption that they are no good at all ; but in this case I am willing to be led by Mr Davie, and to agree that they may be very good. Each time I prove a Stevens poem on my pulses I am glad that I trusted those revered critics who told me he is a great poet ; and having received a genuine poetic experience from one or two of Mr Tomlinson's elusive poems, I have high hopes that I may grow to like others. Their strongest quality perhaps is their integrity. Almost all his poems could have been longer, and would have been more effective if they were: *Through Binoculars* is a good attack on some sort of language bad for poetry, but he does not make it quite clear what. I lament this stern decision by the poet, but I can quite see why he could not bear to yield to the lull of a rhythm (how spare the poems are!) or the wish to make things clear for the reader. I admire him for it ; but I am, after all, the reader.

L. D. Lerner



## BOOKS RECEIVED

- In Sleep a King*, by Thomas Ansell. (The Fortune Press, 6/-.)  
*The Fool and Fancy*, by Anthony Bailey. (Fantasy Press, 2/-.)  
*Time and Other Poems*, by Robert Cecil. (Putnam, 3/6.)  
*Poems*, by Robert Conquest. (Macmillan, 10/6.)  
*Seven Phases of Love*, by P. D. Cummings. (Macmillan, 8/6.)  
*Brides of Reason*, by Donald Davie. (Fantasy Press, 6/-.)  
*Modern Greek Poems*, by Phivos Delphis. (Villiers Publications, 6/-.)  
*Audition*, by Charles Duranty. (The Guild Press, 2/-.)  
*Collected Poems*, by William Empson. (Chatto and Windus, 10/6.)  
*Upon This Rock*, by James Kirkup. (Geoffrey Cumberledge, O.U.P., 6/-.)  
*Fantasy Press Pamphlet No. 28*, by L. D. Lerner. (9d.)  
*Some Poems*, by Erica Marx. (Hand and Flower Press, 7/6.)  
*Selected Poems*, by James Boyer May. (Inferno Press, 13/6.)  
*Twigs as Varied Bent*, by James Boyer May. (Villiers Productions, 6/-.)  
*Poetry from Cambridge, 1952-4*, edited by Karl Miller. (Fantasy Press, 5/-.)  
*Experiment in Error*, by Blanaid Salkeld. (Hand and Flower Press, 7/6.)  
 Some of these books will be reviewed in forthcoming issues of LISTEN.

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